23 C

MDP of God

How many parents have ever said to your kids something like, “I’ve told you a million times not to do that!”

My parents said things like that a lot

We human beings tend *to exaggerate just a little*—I know I’ve said about my dad a lot of times that *he never let the facts get in the way of a good story*

[A lot of our political leders seem to have the same issue….]

Anyway—it’s important to understand that Jesus communicates like we do—sometimes we make exaggerations to make a point—sometimes we phrase things in ways that clearly are not meant to be taken literally—So Jesus often uses what some theologians refer to as “Semitic overstatement” or hyperbole to make His point

So for instance Jesus at one point says, “if your hand leads you to sin, cut it off—it’s better to go through life with one hand then to end up in hell with two hands”

He said, “If your eye leads you to sin, pluck it out—it’s better to go through life with just one eye than to end up in hell with two eyes”

He says, “if your foot leads you to sin, cut it off—it’s better to go through life with one foot than to go to hell with both feet”

As I look around the church –it’s clear that no one takes that literally---I know if I did—I wouldn’t be able to talk to you because I’ve sinned with my tongue and it would be gone—I wouldn’t be able to see you because I’ve sinned with my eyes and they would be gone---*it fact there wouldn’t be much of me left*

But in that passage Jesus is trying to drive home the point that sin is serious business –*He’s not telling us to mutilate ourselves,* but He is telling us that it’s essential to strive to overcome sin in our lives

Well in today’s gospel Jesus also uses some hyperbole when He says, “Unless you hate your mother and father—wife and children--your brothers and sisters---you can’t be my disciple”

Jesus is again using Semitic overstatement (hyperbole) to make His point---*His point is that we need to love Him above everyone and everything else*

Jesus and our faith can’t be our #2 priority of our lives- or #3 priority of our lives —or #17th priority of our lives

Jesus has to be the #1 priority of our lives

*And that’s actually a pretty tough teaching*-because we don’t see Him in the flesh everyday—and when we do see Him it’s in the form of the Eucharist

So even though Jesus is the One through whom we’ve been created—even though Jesus died on the cross to save us—without Him we’d have no hope of heaven---  *it can still be tough to love Him over the people we do see*—the people who have been physically in our lives---takes a lot of growth in faith to love Him in that way

**But that is exactly what God calls us too**

Going to heaven is what life is about--Gazing on God (what we call the Beatific Vision)—being in His presence—basking in His glory—is our hope on earth and will be our joy for all eternity

**That’s what we’re made for**

And that’s the point Jesus is making today---we’re not to treat God like a side show—God isn’t meant to be an afterthought in our lives---*God is what life is all about!*

He made us for Himself—our entire hope in life is to be with Him forever in heaven—to go through life like God isn’t a priority is just foolish

There are times I’ll be meeting with people as they’re preparing for marriage—or they want a sponsor certificate and when I ask them about coming to receive Jesus at Mass they’ll say, “Well *I believe in God”*—like that’s some huge great thing

The Devil believes in God—but he’s never going to heaven

We’re saved by faith—and the 1st command of faith is “**to love God** with all our hearts, all our minds, all our souls and all our strength”---**that’s a lot different than just believing God exists**

Just believing in God without making Him the Lord of our lives won’t save us

Just believing in God without seeking to grow in a relationship with Him—won’t save us

The point here is—**God made us for Himself**---*but He’s not going to force Himself on us*---we’re free to be in a relationship with Him or not---we’re free to love Him or not—we’re free to make Him the Lord of our lives or not

But there’s a natural end to all of those things—if we love Him we’ll be with Him forever—if we choose not to love Him – *He won’t force Himself on us*

If we choose a real relationship with Him—we’ll be with Him forever—if we choose to live like He doesn’t matter---well—He won’t force Himself on us—so we won’t be with Him forever

If we choose to make Him Lord of our lives we’ll gaze on Him for all eternity---if we choose to be Lord of our own lives—*He won’t force Himself on us* so we’ll be away from Him for all eternity

The choice is ours—but it’s a choice that has eternal consequences –choice is ours

Jesus doesn’t want us to hate our mothers or fathers—our spouses or children—our brothers and sisters----///*He doesn’t want us to hate anyone*

But if we make them more important than Him---if we make anyone or anything more important than the God who created us—more important than the God who humbled Himself to become one of us and suffered an agonizing death on a cross so that we can be saved--- if we make anyone or anything more important than the One who gives us the hope of eternal life in heaven---**then we’ve chosen against Him**

Let me use a little analogy here--- most people dream of falling in love with someone who will love them completely in return

That was certainly a dream of mine—which made the call to priesthood so difficult for me

But most of us dream of loving someone who will love us completely in return—right????

So what if you got married to a person who you thought would love you like that—but afterwards you find that when it comes to their priorities you’re about number 9 on their priority list---how would you feel?

*Would you be satisfied?*---I don’t think so---Would you think, *well at least I’m in their top ten, that’s okay*—again, I don’t think so---in fact *folks if you would be satisfied with that-*--**you’re an idiot---** I don’t want to mince words here [**God’s not an idiot**]

It’s important to remember folks, anything you love about your mom or dad—*is infinitely greater in God*

Anything you love about your husband or wife---is infinitely greater in God

Anything you love about your children—is infinitely greater in God

The fact is we’re creatures---we’re imperfect—**God is perfect**---we are weak—**God is all-powerful**---we are sometimes clueless—**God is all knowing**---

*No creature can begin to compare with God*

To love anyone or anything more than God is foolishness—that is the point Jesus is making today

Folks let’s not be foolish---let’s choose (and it is a choice)—to love God with all our hearts, all our souls, all our mind, and all our strength

Let’s choose to make Him Lord of our lives

Normally I would end there

But the last few days I’ve been looking at pictures from the Bahamas

The devastation that is there is incomprehensible

My heart breaks for the people of that poor nation

In light of that I’d like to reflect for a moment on our 1st reading that said, “Who can know God’s counsel, or who can conceive what the LORD intends? For the deliberations of mortals are timid, and unsure are our plans. For the corruptible body burdens the soul and the earthen shelter weighs down the mind that has many concerns.  And scarce do we guess the things on earth,  
 and what is within our grasp we find with difficulty; but when things are in heaven, who can search them out?”

Basically that reading is saying, “God’s ways are not our ways” basically it’s saying we’re pretty clueless

We look at human suffering and it’s very hard for us to comprehend God’s love in all of this

Many ask, “How could a loving God allow this to happen?”

And that’s a great question and I wish I could give you a ten second answer—I’m afraid I can’t

Scripture tells us that God will never give us more than we can handle---but St Mother Theresa of Calcutta commented on that one time---she said, “I know God doesn’t give us more than we can handle, but sometimes I wish God didn’t trust me so much”

But I’ve often encountered people who have suffered incredibly---who had huge enormous losses in life—great sufferings and heartaches---*but who radiated the joy of the Lord* [Many saints have done the same]

They never could have radiated joy without God’s loving grace in their lives

I don’t fully understand why there’s so much suffering—*I could go on at great length about God’s plan and how suffering fits into His plan*—but the bottom line is the reality of suffering includes great mystery—it boggles the mind

But I know I’ve experienced the grace of God at the darkest points of my life which has lifted me up

I’ve seen God’s grace in the lives of so many others in the midst of their heartaches and losses—raising them to great heights of love and joy

So while we can’t understand fully the purpose of suffering—we need to recognize that our little peanut brains can’t begin to comprehend the incredible Wisdom of the all-powerful Creator of heaven and earth

A huge part of faith—a huge part of recognizing that God is who He says He is and that He loves us—a huge part of faith *is trusting in God’s love—even when we don’t understand ---*trusting in His mercy ^^^—and trusting in His Wisdom ^^^

My friends—in the midst of that devastation in the Bahamas—let’s trust in His Wisdom—in His love—in His mercy—Amen? Amen